



Katy Gallagher MLA
DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

TREASURER
MINISTER FOR HEALTH
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES
MINISTER FOR WOMEN

MEMBERFORMOLONGLO

Ms Heather McLaren
Chair
Christians for an Ethical Society
PO Box 5709
HUGHES ACT 2605

Dear Ms McLaren

Thank you for your letter of 26 May 2009 outlining your concerns about services and policies for people experiencing mental illness. I appreciate your acknowledgment that each of us in the community has a responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of those experiencing a mental illness and your recognition of the leading role of governments in this.

The ACT Government has worked closely with the ACT community over recent months to identify priorities for development of the mental health sector over the next five years. These are detailed in the Mental Health Services Plan 2009-2014 (the Plan) which is soon to be launched. A Steering Committee comprised of government and community organisation representatives, mental health consumers and carers has overseen the development of the Plan and the extensive consultations throughout.

The Plan utilises a population health framework to develop services which support and enhance the capacity of the people of the ACT to achieve good mental health and support their overall wellbeing. With a vision for 2020, the Plan recognises the need to consider ways in which services outside mental health impact on, and can influence the wellbeing of the general population including those already experiencing mental illness. The Plan promotes a network of services including as examples schools, the employment sector and the aged care sector which are well integrated, ensuring a holistic approach to a mental health consumer's recovery.

The ACT Government aims to increase mental health funding to 12% of the health budget in the future. This will make a significant contribution towards implementing the vision of the Plan. I recognise too that funding alone will not help us to achieve change in all areas, for example in an area that you mention as a concern; the continuing prejudice that is experienced by people with mental illness. It is indeed the responsibility of the whole community to challenge attitudes and stigma surrounding mental illness.

ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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The commitment of the ACT Government to mental health is not new, as demonstrated by the increased funding towards mental health in recent years. The Stanhope Government has increased recurrent funding on mental health from \$27.4 million in 2001-2002 to \$77.7 million in 2009-2010. In addition the ACT Government has committed to building a new adult mental health facility at the Canberra Hospital, a youth mental health facility and a secure mental health facility over the next three years. A new six bed Mental Health Assessment Unit to support consumers who present at the Canberra Hospital Emergency Department will come into service early next year.

In 2004-2005 the ACT reported the second highest per capita spending (\$129.63) on mental Health services (well above the national average of \$117.27), and the highest percentage of total mental health spending on the non-government community services sector (13% compared to a national average of 6.3%). In 2006-2007, the ACT had the highest number of community service contacts per 1000 population (602.9) and the highest number of service contacts per patient (34.4). The ACT recorded the highest rate of community follow up for people within the first seven days of discharge from hospital for 2006-2007, (73%) compared with other jurisdictions.

Thank you for raising this important issue with me, and I trust that the above information is helpful. The ACT Government welcomes comments and suggestions from members of the ACT community regarding services for consumers and their families and carers where there is mental illness.

Yours sincerely

Signed

Katy Gallagher MLA
Minister for Health
16.6.09